

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	PDQ Inc.-Expired CRP to Agricultural Land Classification
Proposed Implementation Date:	Spring 2016
Proponent:	PDQ Inc., 1113 1 st South, Shelby, MT 59474
Location:	Lease #3244, T33N, R4E, Sec 17 -321.70 Acres
County:	Liberty
Trust:	Common Schools

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

CRP contract #874A containing 321.70 acres expired on 09/30/2015. The lessee, PDQ Inc., has requested to break these expired CRP acres. The CRP acres were offered for re-enrollment, but were rejected by the FSA for the CRP program. The tract was last farmed in 1999. The estimated acres that will be broke and returned to small grain production is 321.70 acres. The lessee plans to spray the CRP out during the spring of 2016 and then direct seed it to winter wheat in the fall of 2016 if moisture conditions allow for this.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

DNRC-Surface Owner
PDQ Inc., Lessee, Lease #3244.
Ryan Rauscher-MFWP
Montana Salinity Control Association
Montana Audubon Society

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

DNRC is not aware of any other agencies with jurisdiction or other permits needed to complete this project.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A (No Action) – Deny PDQ Inc. permission to break the expired CRP and return it to small grain production.

Alternative B (the Proposed action) – Grant PDQ Inc. permission to break the expired CRP and return it to small grain production.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.

These tracts consist of gently rolling topography. The below table outlines the soil types that will be broke.

Slope	Class	T-Factor	WEG	Estimated WW Yield	Acres	Section
0-4%	3E	5	6	39 bu/acre	25.00	17
0-4%	3E	5	6	40 bu/acre	260.00	17
2-8%	3E	5	6	40 bu/acre	36.70	17
TOTAL	3E				321.70	
TOTAL	BREAK				321.70	

Class 3 soils have severe limitations that restrict the choice of plants and require special conservation practices. The letter "e" shows that there is an erosion hazard unless close-growing plant cover is maintained.

The class 3E soils have an expected yield of 39-40 bu/acre for winter wheat are susceptible to wind and water erosion. These erosion concerns will be mitigated due to the residue produced not being destroyed by the utilization of no-till farming practices. Clearly, the majority of the soils on this tract meet DNRC's land break requirements.

The last noted practice type was CP-25 which is for rare and declining habitat. The reason for initial enrollment in CRP is for increased revenue and due to farming difficulties presented by the utilization of mechanical tillage which destroyed the resided produced by small grain production.

Jane Holzer, Montana Salinity Control Association commented, "There does not appear to be any salinity problems in this section or anywhere nearby since the 1990's and MSCA doesn't have any projects in this vicinity so there does not seem to be any reason to deny the breaking request." (See attached E-mail)

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.

There are no documented and/or recorded water rights associated with the tract. Other water quality and/or quantity issues will not be impacted by the proposed action.

6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.

No cumulative effects to air quality are anticipated.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.

The existing CRP vegetation is native species consisting of primarily bluebunch, slender, and western wheatgrass. The tract was last farmed in 1999. The vegetative community will be altered by the reclassification. The conversion of CRP to small grain production will increase the overall productivity of the tract as the current grass stand has very low vigor.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted and there were no plant species of concern noted or potential species of concern noted on the NRIS survey.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

Ryan Rauscher, Wildlife Biologist, -MT Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, commented, "I have reviewed the Pondera County DNRC breaking request #3244 that I received from your office 5/9/2016. Any breaking of permanent vegetative cover and conversion to grain production will not be positive for wildlife species in general, and specifically problematic for ground nesting birds, small mammals, upland game birds, mule deer and antelope populations. Given that this parcel is adjacent to native vegetation, converting this parcel to small grain production reduces the wildlife values on a larger scale than just the parcel itself. Because of those considerations I would ask that DNRC not allow the tract to be broken." See attached letter.

These concerns will be somewhat mitigated as the proposed action will remove the permanent vegetative cover, but the residue produced in small grains production will still provide limited cover and food for the area wildlife.

Converting existing CRP acres to agricultural land will decrease wildlife thermal and hiding cover. This reduction of cover may adversely impact various wildlife species including songbirds, upland game birds, waterfowl, antelope, white tailed deer, and mule deer. Agricultural land may provide a limited food source for wildlife species including deer, antelope, upland game birds and migrating waterfowl. No comments were received from the Montana Audubon Society.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

There are no threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern associated with the proposed project area. Montana FWP did provide site specific comments regarding wildlife, (see item #8). At this time, no known unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources have been identified within the proposed project area. The project consists of 321.70 acres of CRP which is only a very small portion of the total uncultivated acres held within Liberty County.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted. There were two animal species of concern and zero potential species of concern noted on the NRIS survey: Birds-Chestnut-collared Longspur, and McCown's Longspur. This particular tract of CRP does not contain many, if any of this species. If any are present, they may be dispersed into surrounding permanent cover.

With the use of the USDA-NRCS Conservation Plan, minimum cumulative effects are anticipated.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

Patrick Rennie, DNRC archaeologist, was contacted and he stated that due to the CRP being previously farmed, no historical, archaeological, or paleontological resources would be present.

11. AESTHETICS:

Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.

Since the fields are currently in CRP and the surrounding tracts are all farmed, reclassification as agricultural land will not affect the aesthetics of the area.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:

Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.

The demand on environmental resources such as land, water, air, or energy will not be affected by the proposed action. The proposed action will not consume resources that are limited in the area. There are no other projects in the area that will affect the proposed project.

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:

List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

There are no other projects or plans being considered on the tract listed on this EA.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.</i>• <i>Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.</i>• <i>Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.</i>

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

The proposed project will not change human safety in the area.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

The reclassification to agricultural land will increase the vegetative productivity of this tract. The estimated WW yield is 39-40 bu/acre. In a 50-50 crop fallow system economic returns will vary between \$20.00/acre to \$30.00/acre.

The current CRP payment is \$37.01/acre at a 42.20% share, but will not be sustained due to the contract has expired. Converting these acres to cropland, the Common Schools trust would see an increase in revenue.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.

The proposed action will not significantly affect long-term employment in the surrounding communities.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

The proposed action will increase the tax revenue due to the increased revenue generated in small grain production.

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:

Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

There will be no increases in traffic, no changes in traffic patterns, and no need for additional fire protection, or police services.

There will be no direct or cumulative effects on government services.

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:

List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

The proposed action is in compliance with State and County laws. No other management plans are in effect for the area.

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:

Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

This tract of state land is rural and generally has low recreational value. The tract is legally accessible and the proposed action is not expected to impact general recreational and wilderness activities on this state tract.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:

Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing

The proposal does not include any changes to housing or developments.

No direct or cumulative effects to population or housing are anticipated.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

There are no native, unique, or traditional lifestyles or communities in the vicinity that would be impacted by the proposal.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

The proposed action will not impact the cultural uniqueness or diversity of the area.

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:

Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

The proposed conversion of CRP to agricultural land will greatly improve the productivity on the tract and increase the return to the trust. The current grass stand has lost its vigor and has very low productivity. The CRP acres were offered for re-enrollment, but were rejected by the FSA for the CRP program. Therefore, converting this acreage to small grain production will provide the Common Schools trust with an estimated return of between \$20 - \$30/acre, depending on grain prices. No other unique circumstances exist.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Tony Nickol	Date: May 24, 2016
	Title: Land Use Specialist, Conrad Unit, Central Land Office	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B (the Proposed action) – Grant PDQ Inc. permission to break the expired CRP and place it into small grain production.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

This tract of state land is adjacent to productive farm land. All acres meet current Departmental breaking policy, which indicate that soils are suitable for small grain production under no till farming practices. The lessees must work with FSA and NRCS and obtain a Conservation Plan and comply with all sod busting regulations. Breaking these acres will help meet TLMD objectives by increasing revenue to the school trust. An average of 39-40 bu/acre winter wheat or \$20.00 to \$30.00 per acre annual return is expected for this acreage. Significant negative impacts are not expected with this break.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

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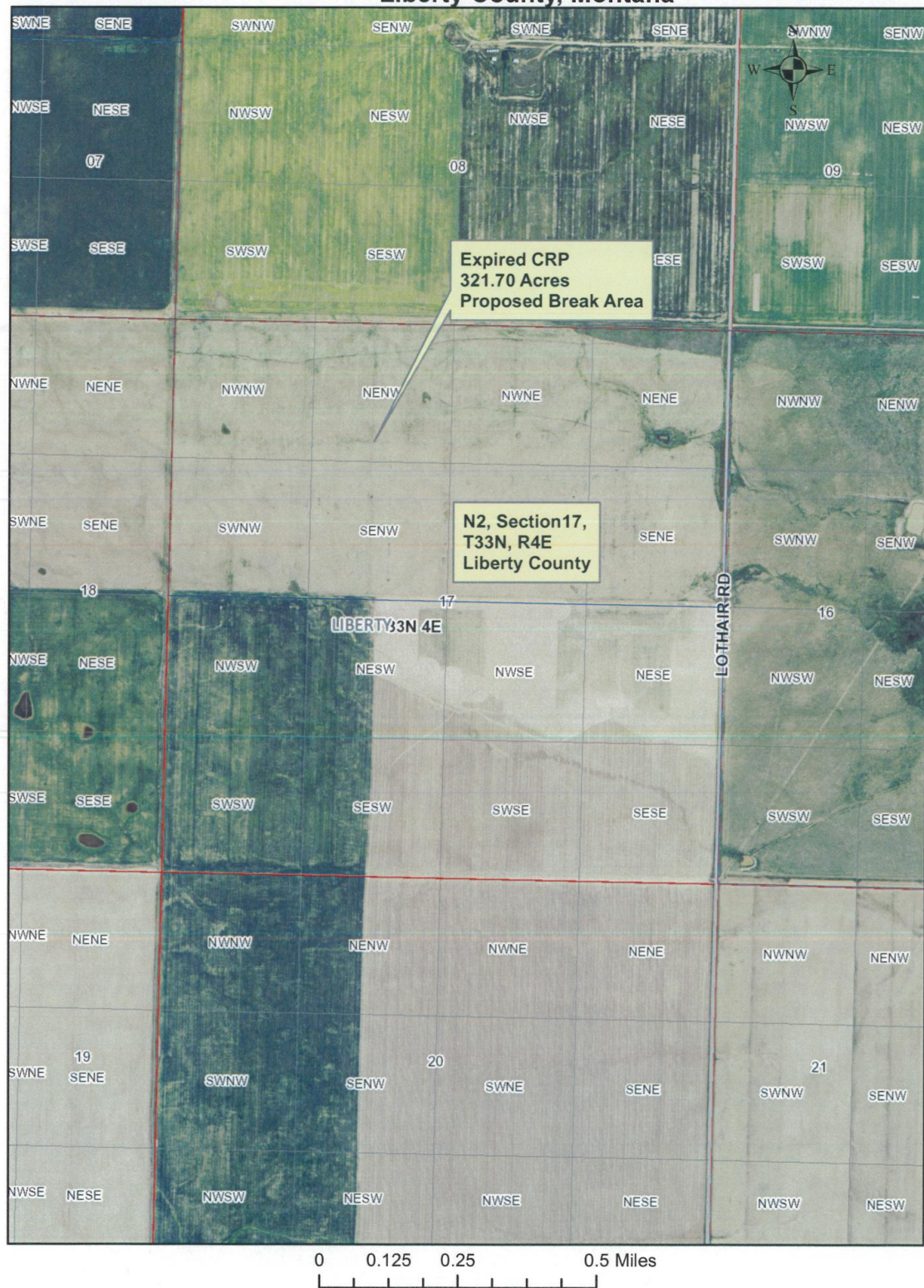
More Detailed EA

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No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Erik Eneboe
	Title: Conrad Unit Manager, CLO, DNRC
Signature:  Date: May 24, 2016	

Liberty County, Montana



Nickol, Tony

From: Jane Holzer MSCA <msca@3rivers.net>
Sent: Monday, May 16, 2016 3:46 PM
To: Nickol, Tony
Subject: Liberty Co. CRP breaking

CRP breaking request for State Lease #3244 N2 Section 17 T33N R4E

There does not appear to be any salinity problems in this section or anywhere nearby since the 1990's and MSCA doesn't have any projects in this vicinity so there does not seem to be any reason to deny the breaking request.

Jane Holzer
Program Director
Montana Salinity Control Association
PO Box 909
Conrad, MT 59425
(406) 278-3071
msca@3rivers.net



**Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks**

5/23/2016

Tony Nickol
DNRC Central Land Office
P.O. Box 961
Conrad, MT 59425

RE: Lease #3244 (Section 17, T33N, R04E)

Dear Tony,

I have reviewed the Pondera County DNRC breaking request #3244 that I received from your office 5/9/2016. Any breaking of permanent vegetative cover and conversion to grain production will not be positive for wildlife species in general, and specifically problematic for ground nesting birds, small mammals, upland game birds, mule deer and antelope populations. Given that this parcel is adjacent to native vegetation, converting this parcel to small grain production reduces the wildlife values on a larger scale than just the parcel itself. Because of those considerations I would ask that DNRC not allow the tract to be broken.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ryan L. Rauscher". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first and last names being more prominent.

Ryan L. Rauscher
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MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks
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